The Stamps emphasis and unique embrace of research first as a methodology for teaching artistic practice is excellent. This emphasis prepares your graduates for rich careers that are not bound by medium or subject, or even a conceptual history/frame that can be limiting.”

– Will Brown, Assistant Curator (MOCA, Cleveland)
Our process begins with curiosity. A reflection that leads to questioning: how come, what if, why not? We investigate. We reconfigure, reframe, and reconsider. We seek alternate approaches and points of view. We challenge limited notions of research and embrace the role of creative practice in the creation of new knowledge. Fueled by the energy and expertise in our research university community, our concepts take shape and make an impact on the world.
Here’s what you can expect:

- Rigorous research and inquiry
- Studio and post-studio work
- Creation of culturally relevant work
- Support for taking creative and conceptual risks
- Collaborators across fields of study
- Commitment to international engagement
- Ample facility space
- Deep and meaningful connections with visiting artists
- Transparent financial processes
- Opportunity to be part of the cultural renaissance of Detroit
- Close working relationship with faculty mentors
No

Media-specific majors

Studio isolation

Stagnation
Stamps MFA students join a supportive, curiosity-filled culture of makers and scholars. Idea and material work together at Stamps, as the curriculum supports students in the creation of culturally relevant work with a clearly articulated context. Graduates leave the Stamps MFA program with a newfound clarity on how their work reflects and intersects with the world-at-large. The outcomes are limitless.

MFA students synthesize knowledge, skills, and experiences into creative work that provides (and provokes) new insights about life, environments, culture, society, and the complex networks and relationships that bind them together.”

- Elona Van Gent, Professor
Two-year program

Mentorship from a creatively diverse community of 23 highly engaged Stamps faculty members (plus faculty from across the university)

33,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art, grad studio facility

Exhibitions in the new, 8,000 square-foot Stamps Gallery in downtown Ann Arbor

Self-directed summer field work - international project

Career preparation, networking, and post-graduation career planning process

Course electives throughout the university

Financial support

Post-graduate professional opportunities

Curricular support for creative work driven by research and inquiry
Part of her Grief Work series, this installation by Brenna K. Murphy (MFA ’18) features a 100-foot woven burial shroud that includes strands of hair from the artist's own head. In 2018, the series was awarded the prestigious College Art Association Professional Development Fellowship. With only one MFA student selected each year, the fellowship provides $10,000 in grant funding to further the recipient's creative work.
Students conduct their creative work in spacious, fully equipped studios in a 33,000 square-foot building that also houses faculty studios, project spaces, wood shop, metals shop, digital media studio, and large shared working and meeting areas.

At Stamps, graduate students also have 24/7 access to large state-of-the-art metals, fibers, ceramics, sculpture, wood, printmaking, digital media, and digital fabrication studios, as well as a range of resources only available at a top research university, such as audio engineering booths, robotic labs, virtual reality studios, specialized libraries, institutes, collections, botanical gardens, and much more.
Stamps Visiting Artists, Writers, and Curators

Recent Visitors to the MFA Studios:

- Alison Wong
  Gallery Director
- Anthony Marcellini
  Critic and Artist
- Ben Davis
  Writer and Critic
- CAMP
  Artist Collective
- Chido Johnson
  Artist and Professor
- Gregory Volk
  Critic, Writer, and Professor
- Hamza Walker
  Curator
- Hannah Whitaker
  Artist and Professor
- Laura Mott
  Curator (Cranbrook Museum)
- Katrin Sigurdardottir
  Artist
- Lily Cox-Richard
  Artist
- Lumi Tan
  Curator
  (The Kitchen)
- Lynn Crawford
  Critic and Writer
- Mark Dion
  Artist and Professor
- Mary Mattingly
  Artist
- Rosie Sharp
  Critic, Writer, and Artist
- Steve Panton
  Gallery Director
- Taylor Aldridge
  Curator (DIA)
- Zaneli Mohuli
  Artist
- Tracey Snelling
  Artist
- Zafos Xagorias
  Artist
- Vince Carducci
  Critic, Writer, and Professor
- Will Brown
  Curator (MOCA, Cleveland)
- Yesomi Umolu
  Curator (Logan Center for the Arts UChicago)
Students have direct access to the wide array of creative innovators who are part of the Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series and the Witt Visitors Program. Visiting artists and lecturers meet with graduate students for individual studio visits.

Recent Penny Stamps Speaker Series Visitors:

- Alexis Rockman
  Painter

- Andrea Zittel
  Social Practice Artist

- Antony Gormley
  Sculptor

- Dave Hickey
  Arts Writer and Cultural Critic

- Ernesto Neto
  Installation Artist

- Hank Willis Thomas
  Photo Conceptual Artist

- Heavy Industries
  Web Art Group

- Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle
  Video and Installation Artist

- Janine Antoni
  Multimedia Artist

- Jeremy Deller
  Video and Installation artist

- Julian Schnabel
  Painter and Filmmaker

- Mariko Mori
  Video and Photographic Artist

- Mary Sibande
  Installation Artist

- Matthew Coolidge
  Curator and Advocate

- Nick Cave
  Sculptor

- Philip Glass
  Composer

- Pussy Riot
  Activists

- Robert Wilson
  Director and Playwright

- Sally Mann
  Photographer

- Sanford Biggers
  Interdisciplinary Artist

- Shahzia Sikander
  Painter and Video Artist

- Superflex
  Social Activist Artists' Group

- Tania Bruguera
  Activist Performer

- Vik Muniz
  Artist and Photographer

- Wangechi Mutu
  Painter and Collagist

- William Pope.L
  Performance Artist

- Zandra Rhodes
  Fashion Designer
Summer Field Work - International Project

During the summer between their two years, each student conducts research, either domestically or internationally, that will have an impact on their thesis work.

Stamps recognizes that creative practice is global in its scope and impact. With funding support from the school, each student conducts a self-directed research and creative practice trip. Past trips included researching the residual effects of colonialism in South Africa; recording sound in Egypt’s museums, tombs, and temples; developing film in Iceland’s volcanic baths; uncovering alternate narratives of early exploration history with the Igloolik community in the Canadian Arctic Circle; working with porcelain sculpture artisans in Jingdezhen, China; and participation in a two-month residency at the MeetFactory International Center of Contemporary Art in Prague.

Countering the Bull, a one-hour meditative performance at the Kadikoy Bull sculpture in Istanbul, Turkey by Ruth Burke.
Ann Arbor is consistently ranked one of America’s best college towns, offering a rich cultural and intellectual life and a vibrant sense of community. We’re just a short drive away from Detroit, where arts and culture are driving urban revitalization.

Explore the region online:
- artdetroitnow.com
- culturesource.org
- pulp.aadl.org
- hyperallergic.com (search Detroit)
- visitannarbor.org
A Stamps MFA prepares creative practitioners for incredible careers.

Stamps MFA students have gone on to a wide range of careers, including exhibiting artists, entrepreneurs, cultural critics, professorships, community arts organizers, commercial and non-profit arts administrators. Post-graduate support — including residencies, grants, and a certificate program in museum studies — are also available.
A visiting artist, critic, curator, or gallery director participates in nearly every MFA crit, providing MFA students with an opportunity to receive multiple perspectives and form a robust professional network.

“Having experienced dozens of MFA thesis shows over the years, I was incredibly impressed by the supportive and ambitious environment of the Stamps School of Art & Design. It was rare to visit a thesis program in which the execution of the work, the conceptual aspects of the work, and the presentation of the work were all equally considered.”

- Lumi Tan, Curator (The Kitchen, New York)
Access to Unparalleled Knowledge Communities
Resources

- world-class studios
- 8,000 sq. ft. Stamps Gallery
- radiology lab
- state-of-the-art digital media labs
- multi-camera HD video studios
- robotics institute
- virtual reality cave
- 3D printers, routers, and scanners
- physical computing studio
- materials library
- computer and video game archive
- nanotechnology institute
- industrial knitting machines
- map libraries
- 7-axis robotic fabrication system
- large-format printers
- electronic music studios
- 24-ft astro-tec dome planetarium
- 7 U-M museums
- artificial intelligence lab
- motion capture facility
- MRI scanners
- museum of zoology collections
- anatomy labs
- professional audio recording studios
- botanical gardens
- entrepreneurship clinic
- 121 music practice rooms
- dance studios
- Gamelan ensemble
- 1.7 million plants in the herbarium
- marine hydrodynamics lab

& more...

Collaborators

- engineers
- filmmakers
- dancers
- climatologists
- architects
- astrophysicists
- playwrights
- urban planners
- musicians
- art historians
- public policy makers
- journalists
- microbiologists
- nanotechnology researchers
- anthropologists
- curators
- sound engineers
- social workers
- chemists
- ecologists
- neuroscientists
- botanists
- information architects
- data analysts
- cancer researchers
- egyptologists
- poets
- forensic scientists
- screenwriters
- entrepreneurs
- public health experts
- 3D modeling experts

& more...
Your Faculty

While Stamps MFA students select their own personal faculty advisor, Stamps is a tight-knit creative community with 23 highly engaged faculty members who act as mentors and collaborators to Stamps MFA students.

Throughout the two-year program, our faculty of artists and scholars work closely with students to shape an intellectually-rigorous program of study, individually suited to each candidate’s areas of interest and expertise.

With six NEA recipients, two Fulbright Scholars, three Guggenheim Fellows, and a Pulitzer Prize winner as just a small sampling of the faculty accomplishments at Stamps, MFA students are able to make powerful, life-long connections to prominent culture-makers of our time.

Read more Stamps faculty news online:
stamps.umich.edu/news
Stamps Faculty Expertise

Faculty Research Interests Include

- Art and commerce
- African American history, culture, and representation
- Displacement, migration, and alienation
- Narrative and memory
- Women’s criminalization and censorship
- Reproductive technology
- Sustainable communities
- Feminist theory and contemporary aesthetics
- Social practice
- Relational aesthetics
- Monsters and the monstrous
- Hybrids
- Art and health
- Cosmology and dark matter
- Cross-border identities
- Shelter and vulnerability
- Disability culture

& more...

Mediums Include

- Photography
- Illustration
- Sculpture
- Painting
- Drawing
- Ceramics
- Printmaking
- Textile design
- Installation
- Audio narrative
- Performing arts
- Rapid prototyping technologies
- Video
- Computational and interactive technologies
- Video projection and shadows
- Functional/non-functional objects

& more...

There’s such a range of expertise among the faculty here. I was able to find faculty who mentored me and helped me define the perfect creative practice linked by sound, history, and performance art.”

– Juliet Hinely, MFA student
Outcomes

Graduates of the Stamps MFA program have successfully secured positions in higher education, non-profit organizations, and in the commercial sector. Many secure gallery representation, artist residencies, and/or tenure-track teaching positions. The outcomes are limitless.
In 2018, Shane Darwent was featured in Artforum Magazine’s “Critics’ Picks” section for his solo exhibition at the Spencer Brownstone Gallery in NYC. Critic Wallace Ludel wrote: “One thing I love about Shane Darwent’s show here [...] is that it feels uniquely American — imbued with a plainspoken sentimentality for this country’s rural and suburban spaces.”

Alisha Wessler was featured in an exhibition of emerging sculptors at the Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in 2014, and she was selected for a 2015 artist’s residency at Wave Hill in New York City.

In 2015, Trevor King received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award.

In 2016, Carolyn Clayton was awarded the prestigious Dedalus Foundation MFA Fellowship in Painting and Sculpture.

In 2019, Parisa Ghaderi was named Assistant Professor of Graphic Design in Michigan State University’s Department of Art, Art History, and Design.

A faculty member at Morehouse College, Cosmo Whyte was awarded an Art Matters Award and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation 2019 Biennial Grant, providing $20,000 in unrestricted funding to support creative work. Recent solo exhibitions include Beneath Its Tongue The Fish Rolls The Hook To Sharpen Its Cadence at MOCA in Atlanta, Georgia.
Artist Ruth Burke’s creative practice exists in both the studio and the pasture. Working side-by-side with a small herd of dairy cows, combining experiential and philosophical research, her practice centers on interspecies relationships. *Ruminant* brings the viewer through the barn, into the pasture, the territory of the cow. The work uses sound, video, installation, sculpture, and performance to explore interspecies kinship, ultimately posing the question “what does it mean to have kinship with a cow?”
Ruth in an instructor at the School of Art at Bowling Green State University; a small business owner specializing in research, digital archiving, and video services; and a practicing studio artist with regular national and international exhibition and speaking engagements.  

ruthkburke.com
Robert J. Fitzgerald | Offscreen

Offscreen uses installation, sculpture, video, and performance to investigate the construction of masculinity through movement. Inviting the viewer into a teenage bedroom circa 1989 to investigate the role of media in the development of public performance and private identity, Fitzgerald poses the question, “what does it mean to move like a man?”

Robert is a practicing studio artist, exhibiting nationally and internationally. His latest exhibition, Immerse, was shown at the Ionian Center for the Creative Arts in Kefalonia, Greece.  robertjfitzgerald.com
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN ART

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Carolyn Clayton | Chain of Contagion

Chain of Contagion is part extraction laboratory and part morgue/seed bank for second-hand objects. Embracing the common human belief that everyday objects have an ability to retain and absorb invisible histories through contact, Carolyn Clayton uses sculptural machines and a participatory archive in an attempt to extract historical residues from objects with ambiguous or untraceable pasts.

Carolyn has exhibited her work nationally and internationally and in 2016 was awarded the Dedalus Foundation MFA Fellowship in Sculpture. She has participated in residencies at Elsewhere, Vermont Studio Center (full-fellowship); the A-Z Institute for Investigative Living; and Tomma Rum in Ljusne, Sweden. carolynclayton.net
Carolyn Gennari’s creative practice finds new ways to engage with the past and present. With a process rooted in archival research, Gennari’s works invite viewers to reconsider the role of narrative in history. Searching For What Isn’t There is a film and installation piece about arctic exploration. Combining 19th-century captain’s journals, Inuit oral histories, and first-person research, this work investigates archival instability, myth, and the affective endurance of stories surrounding the arctic.
Carolyn is a practicing studio artist and an exhibition designer and researcher. Recently, her digital exhibition with the RISD Museum, Raid the Icebox, was nominated for a Webby Award. carolyngennari.com
Shane Darwent | The Wilds of Washtenaw

The Wilds of Washtenaw mines the suburban built vernacular to create a garden of contemporary contemplation. This sprawling sculptural installation is anchored by a fast-food inspired grotto — the destination of a journey through vinyl siding, landscape edging, and gas station talismans. The Wilds of Washtenaw serves as a roadmap for pedestrian discovery.

In 2017, Shane received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award. He is currently a practicing studio artist, named a “Critic’s Pick” by Artforum Magazine in 2018 for his exhibition at Spencer Brownstone Gallery: Shane Darwent: Flat End Dome. shanedarwent.com
Mike Bianco | Hive

Hive examines issues of sustainability and environmental and social justice, with a focus on honeybees. Mike is pursuing his PhD at SymbioticA, the art and biology research lab at the University of Western Australia, where he has been awarded a prestigious Australian Postgraduate Award.
Mike is an alumnus of the prestigious Dow Sustainability Fellowship, and the only participant to have ever represented the fields of Art & Design. biancoprojects.com
Jon Verney | Thermophile

Tracing the artist’s journey across an array of volcanic landscapes, Thermophile presents the process and results of using geothermal water and mud to redevelop silver-based photographs. This elemental installation of photography, video, and painting explores the notion of co-creating artwork with the earth, and allowing natural systems equal agency in the process of transformation.

Jon is the recipient of the 2020 Penland Winter Residency Studio Assistantship at the Penland School of Craft. An active studio artist, his 2019 solo exhibitions included Burning at the Center of Things at Gallery 51 in Massachusetts and Rive at SACI Gallery in New York. jonverney.com
The sculptures in *home/Body* deal with the mother-daughter bond, gendered role-play, and self and body, drawing on personal experiences, memory, and feminist theory.

An Assistant Professor of Art at Tarleton State University and a studio artist exhibiting nationally and internationally, Molly is a recipient of postgraduate support from the Stamps MFA Graduate Program, which provided research funding for a 2017 trip to Finland and a 2018 residency in Beijing. [mollyvdierks.com](http://mollyvdierks.com)
Cosmo Whyte | Wake the Town and Tell the People

Wake the Town and Tell the People is an installation of drawings, photographs, and sound sculptures that explore postcolonial identity as a liquid identity, one in a constant state of flux, co-existing in multiple locations.

In 2015, Cosmo received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award. He is currently a faculty member at Morehouse College and a 2019 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Grant recipient, providing $20,000 in unrestricted funding to support creative work. cosmowhyte.com
Trevor King | Listener

A contemplative installation including ceramics, installation, video, sound, photography, and sculpture, Listener encourages sensory consideration of the human being as a vessel.

In 2015, Trevor received the International Sculpture Center’s Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture award. Recent solo exhibitions include Notions at Sculpture Space NYC, and STILLNESSNESS at the Emmanuel Barbault Gallery in New York. trevorkingart.com
Please Come Again is a multimedia exhibition exploring the sensory environment and culture of love hotels in Japan. The show includes photography, installations, and a three-channel projection navigating the themed rooms in love hotels as a metaphor for the female body in contemplating one’s memory, sexuality, and cultural identity.
Alisa’s work has been shown at MoMAPS1, Aesthetica Art Prize, New Mexico Museum of Art, and Beijing’s Art Nova 100 with reviews in LA Times, Hyperallergic, and Huffington Post. She is the recipient of the 2018 Special Arte Laguna Prize and the 2017 Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival Golden Reel Awards for Short Documentary.  alisayang.com
Charles Fairbanks

Charles is a filmmaker and wrestler whose work focuses on Lucha Libre in Mexico. He fights as the One-Eyed Cat with a camera built into his mask. Recently, Charles was selected by Werner Herzog for the first Rogue Film School.

Charles is the recipient of a 2012 Guggenheim Fellowship in the Creative Arts Film and Video category, based on his work while a graduate student at Stamps. The founding professor of Media Arts at Antioch College, his short films — including two on Mexican lucha libre — have shown on POV and at CPH:DOX, Images, Slamdance, Visions du Réel, and over 100 other festivals.  charlesfairbanks.info
MFA Degree Requirements

**MFA students** complete 15 credits of coursework per semester for a total of 60 credits at the completion of the two-year program. The curriculum is designed to accommodate a range of art practices, and combines studio-based inquiry with more scholarly, research-focused work.

**Summary**

**Directed Studio (year 1) – 12 credits**
Each semester, students engage in intense exploration, research, production, and critique of their individual creative work.

**Thesis Studio (year 2) – 12 credits**
An independent project conducted by each MFA candidate during their second year, is guided by a thesis committee, and culminates in an exhibition at the Stamps Gallery, a public talk, and a written thesis describing the work and its significance.

**Critique – 12 credits**
Provides students with weekly opportunities to articulate the ideas and context underpinning their work and receive feedback from faculty, visiting artists/critics, and their peers.

**Elective Courses – 9 credits**
Students choose elective courses to meet their individual MFA curriculum and research goals.

**Stamps Graduate Seminars – 6 credits**
Seminar topics include “Research Methods,” “Professional Practice,” and other topics related to contemporary art practice.

**History/Theory/Criticism – 6 credits**
These courses — offered by Stamps, History of Art, or other U-M units — support the student’s field of inquiry.

**Summer Field Work - International Project – 3 credits**
Stamps supports a three- to five-week international experience for all graduate students during the summer between their first and second year.

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**Nondiscrimination Policy Statement**
The University of Michigan, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action. The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, religion, height, weight, or veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, and admissions. Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the Senior Director for Institutional Equity, and Title IX/Section 504/ADA Coordinator, Office for Institutional Equity, 2072 Administrative Services Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1432; 734-763-0235, TTY 734.447.1388; institutional.equity@umich.edu. For other University of Michigan information call 734.764.1817.
Successful applicants will:

- Hold a bachelor’s degree in art
- Demonstrate an interest in interdisciplinary inquiry
- Identify faculty at Stamps and within the University with whom to work
- Have a strong portfolio of creative work and a record of exhibitions
- Have substantive life experience to draw on in charting new directions for creative practice
- Be prepared for intensive, focused creative inquiry and production

Generous financial support: stipends, assistantships, and tuition waivers

The Stamps School offers generous financial support to graduate students, in addition to teaching/research assistantships, stipends, and discretionary funds that offset studio expenses and international travel. Financial awards are held throughout both years of study and enable focused creative work as well as opportunities to gain experience in teaching and arts management.

Contact us:

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P. 734.763.5247 E. stamps-mfa@umich.edu W. stamps.umich.edu/mfa
The Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design is ranked among the top eight graduate schools in the nation for fine arts according to the 2020 U.S. News and World Report.